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The Reagan-Gorbachev Meeting December 1985

Background: President Reagan met in Geneva November 19-21, 1985, with Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev, the first US-Soviet summit since 1979. Before the meeting, the President had called for a fresh start in US-Soviet relations. After 15 hours of meetings, including more than 5 hours in one-on-one discussions with Mr. Gorbachev, the President concluded that we had now made that start.

In Geneva the two leaders had an intensive and frank discussion of all the issues on the four-part US-Soviet agenda: arms control, regional issues, human rights, and bilateral questions. Each leader made clear where he stands, and both discussed areas of mistrust and suspicion. The joint statement at the end of the meeting recognized frankly that US and Soviet systems and policies are very different and that the competitive nature of our relationships will continue. Nevertheless, the two leaders agreed that they share an overriding responsibility: to ensure that this competition remains peaceful and to work together to strengthen peace.

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The two leaders confirmed the importance of an ongoing dialogue, reflecting their strong desire to seek common ground on existing problems. They therefore agreed to meet again, in the US in 1986 and in the Soviet Union in 1987; in addition there will be meetings of other senior officials of both countries.

Arms control: In the joint statement, the two sides agreed that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. In his discussions with General Secretary Gorbachev, the President reaffirmed his strong commitment to securing deep and stabilizing reductions in offensive weapon systems. At the same time, he outlined his goal of moving deterrence toward a greater reliance on defense and away from the threat of nuclear retaliation. He also stressed that the purpose of the Strategic Defense Initiative is to determine whether strategic defenses are feasible. The President made clear that the US was not prepared to restrict research that was legal under the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, but assured the Soviet leader that our research program will remain consistent with the treaty.

Both sides agreed to accelerate work in the continuing Geneva nuclear and space talks. They called for early progress, particularly in areas where there is common ground, including the principle of 50% reductions in nuclear arms, appropriately applied, and an interim agreement on intermediate-range nuclear forces. On other arms control issues the two sides agreed on:

- Holding experts' discussions to study the feasibility of risk reduction centers;
- Increasing cooperation in support of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty;

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- Accelerating efforts to conclude an effective and verifiable ban on chemical weapons and to hold experts' meetings on preventing the proliferation of chemical weapons;
- The importance of achieving positive results at the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks in Vienna; and
- The need for a document at the Stockholm Conference on Confidence-and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe that would include mutually acceptable confidence- and security-building measures and give concrete expression to the principle of non-use of force.

Regional issues: The President stressed that, in addition to seeking a safer and more stable strategic environment, the US and Soviet Union need to work together to end dangerous regional conflicts. The President raised the issue of the Soviet Union's continuing intervention, both directly and through proxies, in Afghanistan and other areas of the world. He urged intensified consultations on regional conflicts, and both sides agreed to regularize the process of discussions by experts of both sides.

Human rights: The President stressed to Mr. Gorbachev that respect for the individual and the rule of law is as basic to peace as is arms control. He pressed for greater Soviet adherence to international agreements, such as the Helsinki Final Act. The joint statement affirms the importance of resolving humanitarian cases in a cooperative spirit.

Bilateral relations: In bilateral relations the two leaders agreed on the utility of broadening exchanges and strengthening people-to-people contacts. In this connection, Secretary of State Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze signed a new exchanges agreement in Geneva. Both sides intend to expand programs of bilateral cultural, educational, and scientific-technical exchanges and also to develop trade and economic ties. The President and General Secretary Gorbachev also reviewed progress in other bilateral areas, including the civil aviation agreement, our new agreement on air safety in the northern Pacific, and the opening of new consulates in Kiev and New York. The US believes that these steps demonstrate that both countries can work together to resolve problems to our mutual benefit.

A worthwhile beginning: Perhaps the most important result of the 2-day meeting was that it allowed both leaders to discuss differences in a candid and private setting. The talks also provided, as the President stated at the end of the meeting, an opportunity to explore common concerns in all four areas of our relationship. Where there are differences, we believe they are now better understood. Where shared concerns exist, there is now a more solid foundation for dealing with them. In the end, both leaders agreed that real confidence must be built on deeds, not words. The Geneva meeting was a worthwhile beginning to what the US hopes will be a productive process of resolving problems through concrete action.

Harriet Culley, Editor (202) 632-1208